

Rebellion and Judgment

GOD BRINGS JUDGMENT WITH CONSEQUENCES
ON THE DISOBEDIENT.

Numbers 14:11-24

11 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people **despise** **A** me? How long will they **not trust in me** **B** despite all the **signs I have performed** **C** among them? **12** I will strike them with a plague and destroy them. Then I will make you into a greater and mightier nation than they are.” **13** But Moses replied to the LORD, “The **Egyptians will hear about it**, **D** for by your strength you brought up this people from them. **14** They will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, LORD, are among these people, how you, LORD, are seen **face to face**, **E** how your cloud stands over them, and how you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. **15** If you kill this people with a single blow, the nations that have heard of your **fame** **F** will declare, **16** ‘Since **the LORD wasn’t able** **G** to bring this people into the land he swore to give them, he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ **17** So now, may my Lord’s power be magnified just as you have spoken: **18** The LORD is **slow to anger and abounding in faithful love**, **H** forgiving iniquity and rebellion. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generation. **19** Please **pardon** **I** the iniquity of this people, in keeping with the greatness of your faithful love, just as you have forgiven them from Egypt until now.” **20** The LORD responded, “I have pardoned them as you requested. **21** Yet as I live and as the whole earth is filled with the LORD’s glory, **22** none of the men who have seen my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested me these ten times and did not obey me, **23** will ever **see the land** **J** I swore to give their ancestors. None of those who have despised me will see it. **24** But since **my servant Caleb** **K** has a different spirit and has remained loyal to me, I will bring him into the land where he has gone, and his descendants will inherit it.”

Exploring Key Words

- A** Indicates rejecting with disdain or contempt or undervaluing a person or thing. In this case, the people rejected God as their superior and treated Him with contempt.
- B** The basic idea is to stand firm—that is, not fickle and wavering. The Israelites refused to place their wholehearted trust in the Lord.
- C** God’s works had forced Egypt to free Israel. They revealed God’s power. The miracle of manna was a sign of God’s provision.
- D** Moses framed the question in terms of God’s reputation. The Egyptians would question why a God whose power they personally experienced chose to destroy His own people.
- E** The Hebrew refers to one’s eyes. While not even Moses could see God’s face (Ex. 33:18-23), the Israelites had seen His presence with their own eyes and knew He was real.
- F** Other nations knew about God. Rahab said the residents of Jericho knew about God’s works and His promises (Josh. 2:8-12).
- G** Israel’s enemies would question God’s power and goodness, assuming that He could not do what He promised.
- H** Moses quoted the description of God’s holy character given to him when God forgave Israel for idolatry with the golden calf (Ex. 34:6-7).
- I** Forgive (NIV). The Hebrew word (*salach*) is used almost exclusively in the Old Testament to describe God’s forgiveness and grace.
- J** Israel had seen God’s glory. But, thanks to their rebellion, they would never see (or set foot in) the promised land. They would die in the desert.
- K** Caleb (and Joshua, v. 30) were exceptions (Num. 26:65). Because they “remained loyal” to God, they would enter the promised land.



God's Judgment (Num. 14:11-16)

- At the spies' negative report about the inhabitants of Canaan, many of the Israelites wept. They complained to Moses and desired to return to Egypt (14:3-4).
- The Lord threatened to strike the people with a plague and start over with a new people through Moses.
- Moses intervened for the people. He noted that destroying them in a single blow would harm God's reputation among the other nations who would conclude that He was unable to fulfill His promises.

God's Glory (Num. 14:17-19)

- Moses asked God to forgive the sinfulness of the Israelites. God's protection of the people would demonstrate His power.
- Moses also recounted God's character, proclaiming Him to be slow to anger, abounding in love, and forgiving of sin.

Future Consequences (Num. 14:20-24)

- God forgave the rebellion of His people, but He also announced that they would not see the promised land because of their sins. The generation with whom God entered a covenant relationship would not receive the land that was promised.
- Caleb (and later Joshua) would be rewarded for their faithfulness. They would enter the land and inherit their portion.

Summary Statements

God brings judgment with consequences on the disobedient.

- Believers honor God by trusting Him.
- We can count on God to act according to His character.
- We must understand that sin has consequences.

Memory Verse

Numbers 14:18a

Key Doctrine

God the Son

In His substitutionary death on the cross Jesus made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Romans 5:6-10; Colossians 1:14.)

ENGAGE

How much does the opinion of others affect your decision-making? How much should it affect it? (PSG, p. 37)

- Every parent has asked their child: “If everybody jumps off the cliff (or bridge, roof, or into a fire), does that mean you should do it too?” The implied answer is, “No. I would never do that just because somebody else did.”
- Despite parents’ disapproval and internal warning bells, we’ve all made decisions that we regret. We look back and say, “If I only had the chance to do it all over again, I would have chosen differently.”

Bonus: What decision would you like to take back? How did it affect the way you make decisions now?

EXPLORE

1. GOD’S JUDGMENT (NUM. 14:11-16)

Bonus: When have you had a hard time really trusting God? How did you get through that time?

- When the people accepted the spies’ negative report, they wept and complained (Num. 13:21–14:4). Moses and Aaron, along with Joshua and Caleb, urged the people to take the land (14:6–9). But they refused to listen (14:10). Suddenly, the glory of God appeared at the tent of meeting.
- God accused the people of two things: they had despised Him and not trusted in Him. Despite all God had done for them—including parting the Red Sea and provision in the desert—the people still did not trust Him.
- In response, God vowed to wipe out Israel and start new with Moses. But Moses was more interested in God’s “fame,” His reputation among the nations. He didn’t want other nations questioning either God’s power or His mercy.

What adjectives would you use to describe Moses’s words and attitude? (PSG, p. 41)

What impact does our faithfulness to God have on our witness? (PSG, p. 41)

2. GOD’S GLORY (NUM. 14:17-19)

Bonus: How often do you pray for other people? How are those prayers different from the prayers you make for yourself?

- Moses prayed for God’s power to be “magnified.” He wasn’t asking God to do something new. Rather, he wanted God’s power to be magnified by what He had already said. Earlier, God had promised to be slow to anger and abounding in faithful love (Ex. 34:6–7). Because God had forgiven His people in the past—from Egypt until now—Moses was asking Him to do it again.

Why was it important for Moses to appeal to God’s character in his prayer for the people? (PSG, p. 42)

- God’s “faithful love” refers to His loyalty based on His covenant relationship with the patriarchs. It is a reciprocal relationship, meaning He has promised to be faithful to those whom He has called to be faithful to Him.
- Rather than praying for himself, Moses begged God to show mercy to the people. This is the picture of intercession—praying for someone else’s needs with the same intensity that we would pray for our own. It is seeking God on behalf of someone else.

What are some appropriate ways of appealing to God’s character when praying? (PSG, p. 42)

3. FUTURE CONSEQUENCES (NUM. 14:20-24)

Bonus: If you were God, how would you have responded to Israel’s rebellion and Moses’s plea for mercy? Why?

- God responded to Moses by granting forgiveness. But His pardon did not remove the consequences for their sin.
- The Israelites would wander in the wilderness for forty years. Then, all aged twenty and older would die in the wilderness. Their children would inherit the land.
- In contrast, Caleb, God’s servant, would be an exception. Like Joshua (see 14:30), he would enter the promised land because he had been faithful and brought a positive report to the people.

Since God is willing to grant forgiveness for our sin, why do you think He does not remove the consequences as well? (PSG, p. 44)

CHALLENGE

As a group, reflect on how Moses was faithful to intercede for the people.

How might your Bible study group strengthen its prayer ministry? (PSG, p. 45)

Evaluate your life and identify settings where you struggle to stand faithfully for God.

What can you do to prepare yourself to remain faithful to God when the crowd around you wants to do the opposite? (PSG, p. 45)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week’s study.

BIBLE SKILL (P. 44, PSG)

Compare an Old Testament and New Testament passage.

Read Numbers 14:11-24. Note how God pardoned the people, yet their unbelief brought sad consequences. The writer of Hebrews 3-4 referenced this story, drawing parallels between the Israelites' unbelief and his audience's struggle to believe God's promises. Read Hebrews 3:16-4:2, 11. ***What consequences of unbelief and disobedience was the writer of Hebrews concerned about for his audience? What applications might we draw for Christian living today?***

Encourage adults to work in pairs to complete the Bible Skill activity. After a few minutes, allow adults to share what they found and discuss the questions in the activity.

OBJECT LESSON: SCENTED CANDLE

Prior to the session, light a scented candle. (NOTE: *Be sensitive to individuals with allergies.*) Talk about the characteristic of the scent that has filled the entire room. Read aloud Numbers 14:21-22. Compare the way a scent spreads around a room to the way believers are called to spread the glory of God around the earth.

Ask: ***How do we experience the glory of God that fills the earth? Why do many people ignore the signs of God's glory? How can we help magnify God's glory to the people around us?***

Challenge adults to look for ways God is leading them to share His glory with others during the week.

DIG DEEPER

TRUSTING GOD

Numbers 14 explains how Israel's two-week journey turned into a forty-year punishment in the wilderness. With the children of Israel standing on the cusp of the promised land, the Lord was ready, able, and willing to perform another mighty act on their behalf. He was prepared to drive out the mighty inhabitants of Canaan.

All it would take was for Israel to exercise faith in Him, but the Israelites felt that price was too high.

Even though God had demonstrated His power in redeeming His people from bondage in Egypt, they could not bring themselves to trust Him. His love and compassion toward His chosen people was revealed through His readiness to act, the daily provision for their needs, and His constant presence with them. Finally, the time had come to give them the luscious land He had promised them. Having proven His faithfulness to Israel time and again, God was calling on them to exercise their faith once more.

The Scripture calls what Israel did "despising" the Lord. This contempt was marked by their refusal to "trust" in Him despite all their faith lessons. The event would turn out to be a legacy for the people. Centuries later, the anonymous writer of Hebrews recalled this

instance as a warning against hardening one's heart against God and rebelling against Him (Heb. 3:14-19). This reminds us that we are not so different from the individuals we read about in the pages of the Bible. Though we might be tempted to wonder at their lack of belief in the face of all that God had done for them, our doubts and struggles include many of the same characteristics we see in their lives.

Christians are by no means immune from "unbelief" and "hardened hearts" toward God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). The cost for refusing to exercise faith in God's person and power may be tremendous: blessings forsaken, fellowship hindered, and faith not strengthened. God is willing to demonstrate His love, power, and faithfulness in every situation if we would just believe in what He can and wants to do.

Israel's refusal to believe in the God who saved them cost that generation the promised land. What might our unbelief, disobedience, and hardened hearts cost us today?